

Factsheet: Administrator's 4/16 Meeting with Sportsmen for Bristol Bay

Why has a coalition of sportsmen requested a meeting with the Administrator to discuss protecting the fishery of Bristol Bay, Alaska?

- In 2010 and 2011, nine federally recognized tribes from the Bristol Bay region and other stakeholders (**including over 350 sporting groups and businesses – many of whom are participating in the 4/16 meeting with the Administrator**) asked EPA to take action to protect Bristol Bay's salmon populations. They have expressed concern that the significant Bristol Bay salmon fishery would be at risk from large-scale mining.
- We also heard from other tribes and stakeholders who support development in the Bristol Bay watershed and have requested we take no action until a permitting process begins.
- In February 2011, EPA launched its Bristol Bay Assessment to better understand the watershed and its resources. The assessment will inform the agency's response to these competing requests.
- **Sporting groups and businesses** have expressed support for EPA's Bristol Bay Assessment but have urged EPA to also use its Clean Water Act 404(c) authority to protect the Bristol Bay fishery.

What is EPA's Bristol Bay Assessment?

- EPA is conducting a comprehensive analysis of the Bristol Bay watershed to better understand how future large-scale mining may affect the Bristol Bay salmon fishery. EPA will use the results of this assessment to evaluate options for assuring that the resources of Bristol Bay upon which the salmon fishery depends are effectively protected.
- EPA's assessment is being conducted by EPA Region 10, the Office of Water, and the Office of Research and Development with assistance from the USGS, USFWS and NOAA.

What is the schedule for the Bristol Bay Assessment?

- Early May 2012 – Release Draft Assessment for Public and Peer Review
- June 2012 – EPA holds public meetings to present Draft Assessment in Alaska (e.g., in Anchorage as well as locations in Bristol Bay)
- August 2012 – Scientific Peer Review Panel holds open meeting in Anchorage
- Fall 2012 – Release Final Assessment

Background:

- Bristol Bay, Alaska, is home to a salmon fishery that is of significant economic and subsistence value to the people of Alaska and depends on clean water and a healthy watershed to remain sustainable.
 - Bristol Bay produces (on average) almost half of the world's sockeye salmon (30 million fish/year).
 - The Bristol Bay's Kvichak River (on average) produces more sockeye salmon than any other river in the world.
 - The Bristol Bay's Nushagak River is the 4th largest producer of chinook salmon in North America and produces chinook runs that are periodically at or near the world's largest which is remarkable considering its relatively small watershed area.

- The fishery in Bristol Bay is robust and intact, compared to the western US, where 29% of salmon populations are extinct and another third are threatened or endangered.
- The economic value of Bristol Bay's 2010 sockeye salmon was over \$500 million (amounts paid to fishermen and processors).
- The Bristol Bay salmon fishery annually employs over 10,000 people in fishing and fish processing. (In 2009, there were 6,798 employed in salmon fishing and 4,522 employed in fish processing).
- In 2009, approximately \$50 million was spent in Alaska by nonresidents specifically for the purpose of sport fishing in the Bristol Bay region (12,500 fishing trips).
- The Bristol Bay Watershed is the ancestral home to 31 Alaska Native Tribes and provides the same level of ecosystem services that it has for over 4000 years.
- Subsistence fishing and hunting, of numerous species of fish, mammals and birds dependent on the river and lake system, continues to provide native people with up to 80% of their protein, and up to and in some cases surpassing 300 pounds of food per person annually.
- Salmon account for 52% of the subsistence harvest in Bristol Bay (31% of the harvest is from mammals and 10% is from non-salmon fish).
- The Pebble Limited Partnership and other mining interests are actively exploring large-scale metallic sulfide (i.e., gold, copper, molybdenum) mining in the headwaters of two drainage basins in the Bristol Bay that provide key habitat for salmon. Anticipated development from the Pebble Limited Partnership alone has the potential to make this one of the largest mining development projects in the world.
- Tribes and other groups have expressed concerns that the proposed Pebble Mine will jeopardize the Bristol Bay Salmon fishery which is a major economic driver for the region as well as critical for subsistence and cultural use.
- In 2010 and 2011, these concerns prompted nine tribes and a number of other organizations (including fisherman, seafood processors, hunters and anglers, chefs and restaurant owners, jewelry companies, members of the faith community, elected officials and the public from across Alaska and the rest of the country) to petition EPA to use Section 404(c) of the Clean Water Act to prevent or at least restrict the proposed Pebble Mine in the Bristol Bay watershed. Two tribes and a number of other entities (including the Governor of Alaska and the Pebble Limited Partnership) requested that EPA wait for the permitting process before taking any action.
- The analysis will be strengthened by scientific peer review, tribal consultation, federal and state agency participation, as well as public and industry input. EPA will accept and consider public input during development of the watershed assessment and will continue to work closely with tribal governments and state and federal agencies as we undertake this analysis.